

Senator Barbara Boxer:

Madam President, it is wonderful to join the Presiding Officer, Senator Landrieu, Senator Feinstein, and the other women who have come to join us.

I have to say to Senator Mikulski, the dean of the Democratic women, how much I appreciate her leadership and her ability to connect with the American people. When she brought us together the first time--and it was a while back--she said: You know, we women at home make a checklist of the things we have to do for our families and the things we have to accomplish for the people who depend on us. Well, let's do the same thing for the people whom we represent. What emerged is each of the Democratic women picked an issue she knew we needed to have change on, and we have heard about some of them. As the chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee, I am so proud to have that opportunity--the first woman, the first Californian to chair this committee.

I can just say, because I know this: We desperately need change when it comes to the environment. When we say the word "environment," some people think about the beautiful ocean, and they should; and they think about beautiful wetlands, and they should; and they think about beautiful lakes and streams and rivers and clean, flowing waterfalls, and they think about beautiful creatures that roam our environment, and all of that is true. But when we cut through it, a clean and healthy environment means healthy families. Healthy families means people who can work, kids who can go to school and not have to leave because they have asthma. These are the things we have to remember.

For 7 1/2 long years now, since George Bush became President, this administration has done everything it could to roll back landmark environmental laws. What are these laws? The Clean Air Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Superfund Act. In every case, they have done this.

They have also stopped our progress on global warming. We had a bill on the floor a couple of weeks ago. They sent out a message that they were going to veto this bill, even before they saw it amended. Imagine.

I wish to tell the Senate--and I know there are a lot of folks who are watching in their offices--what I mean specifically by this terrible record of the Bush administration and why we want change on the environment. The first thing George Bush did--and I don't know if the Presiding Officer remembers--when he became the President in terms of the environment is try to weaken safe drinking water standards. He tried to actually roll back the standard for arsenic in drinking water--arsenic in drinking water. He tried to slip it through, weaken the standard. I remember working with Senator Mikulski on that issue. We turned it back. We worked in the Senate, and we stopped it. Then, a National Academy of Sciences study found that EPA had actually underestimated the cancer risks from arsenic in tap water, yet there was an effort to roll back the standard for arsenic.

Then there is perchlorate. Thirty-five States have a real problem--most of our States--with perchlorate that has seeped into drinking water and seeped, therefore, into some of our agricultural products. Perchlorate comes from rocket fuel. It is a very dangerous leftover from rocket fuel. Let me tell my colleagues, it poses risks to the thyroid and special risks to pregnant women and infants.

The Bush administration not only has failed to set a standard for perchlorate, but it has stopped enforcing a law that says the water companies and the water utilities have to let people know how much perchlorate is in their drinking water. They no longer have to test for perchlorate. They have not set a standard. Here is their excuse: We don't have enough information. Massachusetts had enough information; they set a standard. California had enough information; they set a standard. But the great big Federal, National Government doesn't have enough information. We know perchlorate is dangerous, we know it is an endocrine disrupter, and we know what that means for pregnant women and children. It is bad news. They are doing nothing. That is why we have the environment on our checklist for change.

Mercury. Mercury is toxic to the brain. Let me repeat that. Mercury is toxic to the brain. We know that. There is no question about it. The Bush administration, under pressure from big utilities, set weak requirements for toxic mercury emissions, and now there is a big court case, and believe me, they are going to lose it.

There are other things. They slowed down Superfund cleanup. They are not protecting endangered species. They are weak on protecting us from smog pollution, particulate matter that gets into our lungs. We are talking about life and death, and then we are talking about global warming, the future of the planet.

Today, the President said to forget the offshore oil drilling moratorium in the most pristine waters of our coastline. Go in there and let the oil companies drill. What he didn't tell the American people is his father put that moratorium in place. What he didn't tell the American people is that there are 68 million acres of untapped leases the oil companies hold that they haven't drilled on, and he would put at risk God's gift that we have been given on these coastlines and he would jeopardize a \$60 billion coastal recreation and tourism economy that fosters more than 2 million jobs.

I am so proud to stand with the Presiding Officer and the Democratic women of the Senate, standing next to this checklist for change: Equal pay for equal work, good jobs, health care, taking care of our military and our veterans, restoring our credibility in the world, protecting the environment, making us energy independent, preparing for future disasters, enforcing fiscal accountability, and protecting the family checkbook. This is a moment for change, and we Democratic women of the Senate wish to be agents of that change.

I thank Senator Mikulski, and thank you very much, Madam President.

I yield the floor.